

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT : Working Notes on US Delegation Session of Guam Conference

TIME : 1030-1415, 21 March 1967

PLACE : Conference Room, COMNAV/Marianas Headquarters Building

PARTICIPANTS: US Delegation only. All US officials attending the joint session were there, plus some others whose names I did not record.

THE PRESIDENT opened the meeting by giving a brief resumé of the 20 March joint session. "Yesterday," he observed, we had heard the Vietnamese report on their efforts and progress. "Today," we would take stock of our own efforts. THE PRESIDENT then asked General Westmoreland to give a report on the US military effort.

General Westmoreland opened by noting that 70 percent of South Vietnam was covered by jungle or by marshland. Eighty percent of the South Vietnamese people lived on 40 percent of the country's territory, and 40 percent of the country's territory was virtually unpopulated. All of this meant the guerrilla enemy had many places to hide and was able to operate in a terrain environment advantageous to him.

General Westmoreland also noted that the eastern part of Laos, particularly the eastern part of the so-called "panhandle," was de facto North Vietnamese territory through which Hanoi could move troops and supplies at will. By land through Laos and across the so-called demilitarized zone, which was no longer demilitarized, and by sea along the coast, Hanoi was infiltrating men into the South at a rate of about 7,000 a month.

The Vietnamese-Cambodian border, undefended and ill-defined in many places, provided the Communists with other advantages, including ready availability of secure sanctuary from which they could sally forth to harass our forces.

Hanoi, despite the Communists' mounting problems, is still confident of victory, still confident that the Communists can wear down the Free World's will to continue the fight.

General Westmoreland then sketched the Communists' over-all command structure, noting that operational control of Communist military activity in South Vietnam's two northernmost provinces (Quang Tri and Thua Thien) was exercised directly from North Vietnam's Military Region IV headquarters in Vinh, North Vietnam.*

General Westmoreland reviewed the many problems facing Free World forces including that of operational security. He noted that the enemy has infiltrated South Vietnamese ranks on both the military and civilian side to such an extent that it is difficult to keep the Communists unaware of any operational planning or information passed to our Vietnamese allies.

General Westmoreland stressed that the enemy's target was not terrain but people, and that he had the bulk of his forces concentrated in South Vietnam's populated areas.

General Westmoreland then reviewed the enemy's order of battle and present troop deposition, and the deposition of allied forces made to counter various Communist threats. He noted that the enemy presently had an eleven division force and estimated that the Communists were striving to achieve a twelve division force structure.**

*General Westmoreland actually said Military Region III, but this was a slip of the tongue.

**General Wheeler (with whom I rode back from Guam) and I both feel that the eleven division figure was another unintentional slip of the tongue. Both MACV and the Washington intelligence community presently credit the Communists with nine headquarters complexes in or near South Vietnam capable of controlling division-sized operations.

In his review of Communist troop depositions, General Westmoreland noted that the Communists had seventy-seven base areas in South Vietnam, three in Cambodia, and seven in Laos. The Laotian bases are marginally accessible by ground operations and could be struck by air. The Cambodian bases are not accessible because of political considerations. Several times during his presentation, General Westmoreland directed attention to the fact that two Communist divisions are presently located in Cambodia in secure sanctuary from which they could sally forth and from where they pose a constant threat against which we have to deploy.

General Westmoreland explained the importance of these base areas in Communist strategy and the success Free World forces have had in base clearing operations. He also pointed out the complexity and difficulty of such operations, noting Communist mastery of camouflage and concealment practices, and the extensive use the Communists made of well-hidden tunnel complexes. By way of illustration, he noted that in Operation JUNCTION CITY (which is presently in train) we have run across what was obviously the headquarters of a major COSVN propaganda unit located in a tunnel. This particular tunnel complex included rooms at least half the size of that in which the Guam conference was being held. In one such room, US forces had recently discovered a complete underground broadcasting station.

General Westmoreland then made a corps by corps review of the current situation. He stated we were making progress in the Mekong delta. There are 91 districts in the delta (i.e., in IV Corps); we were making progress in 45, standing still in 42, and losing ground in four (one district in Kien Hoa Province, one in Vinh Binh and two in Sa Dec). There were three South Vietnamese Army divisions in the delta, two of which (the 21st and the 7th) were very good and--by Vietnamese standards--well led.

The III Corps region is the heartland of South Vietnam and is consequently the area where General Westmoreland had placed the greatest concentration

of US troops. There were serious problems in III Corps, an area in which the enemy had also concentrated great efforts. The three South Vietnamese divisions located in that corps were the poorest in the South Vietnamese Army. To bolster Vietnamese efforts, General Westmoreland was deploying US troops in Gia Dinh and Long An provinces to protect Saigon and to improve security in the immediate vicinity of the capital. General Westmoreland said he was also placing US troops (elements of the 9th Division) in Dinh Tuong Province, where their initial efforts had been both good and effective.*

To meet the Communist threat, new tactics were constantly being devised. For example, General Westmoreland planned to use a "floating brigade" in the Communist stronghold of War Zone C. This brigade would be supplied by parachutes and helicopters, and would keep constantly on the move to harass the Communists and deny them the use of this key base area.

General Westmoreland then reviewed II Corps and his problems in keeping an adequate screen to protect against incursions by the Communist forces presently located in Cambodia.

General Westmoreland used Quang Ngai Province as a concrete illustration of the problems in I Corps. He cited an example of the damage caused by four Communist regiments located in that area, and explained how it could take a full allied division operating in that area for a year to clean it out.

After his detailed review of the situation, General Westmoreland summarized the over-all picture, noting progress and achievement but making the point that unless military pressure causes the

*Dinh Tuong is actually in IV Corps, but General Westmoreland discussed it in the context of his III Corps operations intended to protect the southern approaches to Saigon.

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Viet Cong to crumble and Hanoi to stop its support of southern insurgency, the war in Vietnam could go on indefinitely.

THE PRESIDENT asked General Westmoreland whether he thought the Communists accurately reported their own defeats and losses and hence whether Hanoi had a true picture of the situation in South Vietnam.

General Westmoreland replied that in their reports up the chain of command, the Communists greatly exaggerated their successes and the casualties they inflicted on allied forces.*

Returning to the subject of infiltration, General Westmoreland called attention again to the importance of Communist movement through Laos and suggested the outlines of a plan that would involve recruiting and training tribal elements native to that area (Khas) as forces that could operate in the area and interdict Communist infiltrators.

THE PRESIDENT then initiated a brief discussion of bombing pauses and asked General Westmoreland's opinion about their consequences. General Westmoreland wholeheartedly supported the political wisdom of the pauses ordered to date, but explained the advantage the Communists took of any suspension in the allied aerial interdiction campaign. After some gentle, skillful questioning by the President, General Westmoreland did admit that he hoped these pauses would not become a habit.

THE PRESIDENT thanked General Westmoreland for his fine survey and asked Admiral Sharp to give a report on the aerial campaign against North Vietnam.

*My notes are sketchy here but I believe the point General Westmoreland was making was that the Communists report their own losses with reasonable accuracy but greatly inflate their claims of damage inflicted on allied forces, thus presenting a distorted view of the situation.

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Admiral Sharp made a brief summary review during which he noted his belief that our bombing campaign had been successful in light of its limited objectives. It had not stopped infiltration, but no one had ever thought it would. It had made Communist infiltration immensely more difficult and costly for the Communists and also exerted a constant pressure on the North Vietnamese regime.

Admiral Sharp then asked two of his aides (Marine Corps Brigadier General Hutchinson and a Navy commander whose name I did not catch) to present detailed briefings on CINCPAC operational proposals with respect to aerial bombardment and mining operations.

General Hutchinson outlined an extension of the ROLLING THUNDER operation involving six target systems in North Vietnam:

- (1) transportation
- (2) military complexes
- (3) petroleum storage and distribution facilities
- (4) war supporting industries
- (5) electrical power
- (6) port complexes at Haiphong, Hon Gay, and Cam Pha

(Because of the sensitivity of the subject matter I specifically did not take detailed notes on the projected targets. The JCS can almost certainly provide copies of the briefing folders handed the President, Secretary McNamara, and Secretary Rusk. I do recall that the total proposal was presented in the context of an April-October 1967 time frame, involved seven target packages, and a total of 59 targets. It was estimated that the execution of this program would entail 1,715 civilian casualties in the DRV and the loss of 82 US aircraft.)

General Hutchinson then outlined the MIG threat in North Vietnam, the general problems caused by North Vietnamese air defense capabilities and a

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proposal to cope with these threats. (Again, because of the sensitivity of the subject and its lack of relevance to CIA programs, I specifically did not take detailed notes.)

The Navy Commander then reviewed mining operations which have already been executed and offered a plan for mining the harbors of Haiphong, Hon Gay and Cam Pha. (Once more, I specifically avoided taking detailed notes on this sensitive topic which involved matters outside of CIA's concern.)

THE PRESIDENT then turned to Ambassador Lodge for a report on civil activities in Vietnam, particularly in the field of nation-building and pacification.

Ambassador Lodge observed that because of the lateness of the hour he would discuss only the topic of elections and then ask two of his colleagues (Mr. MacDonald and General Humphreys) for short briefings on the important topics of land reform and civilian casualties.

Ambassador Lodge briefly reviewed the four elections coming up in the near future: the village and hamlet councils to be elected in early May, the presidential election tentatively scheduled for 3 September, the upper legislative house (Senate) election scheduled for 4 September, and the lower legislative house (Assembly) scheduled for one month after that.

THE PRESIDENT noted that this was not the same schedule that Prime Minister Ky had presented the previous day.

Ambassador Lodge acknowledged this and pointed out that Ky may have been over-optimistic. The schedule just outlined (according to US Embassy's best information) was the one presently being planned. Ambassador Lodge emphasized the importance of this electoral process and the course of constitutional development presently in train. He explained the role and influence of Vietnam's military establishment in present South Vietnamese politics.

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and estimated that if the military could agreed on a single candidate, most likely Ky or Thieu, that candidate would probably win. He gave a frank assessment of both Ky and Thieu, and concluded by expressing his belief that the US Government could live and work with either one and should not interfere in the contest now discreetly being waged for the support of the military establishment. Ambassador Lodge pointed out that the constitution drafting process could never have gone so smoothly or been completed so quickly had Ky and Thieu not both genuinely supported the process. Ky's ability to wave the "coonskin constitution" at Guam was a real triumph for Vietnam's present leadership and a profoundly significant indicator of progress.

THE PRESIDENT asked if there were no civilians capable of being serious contenders for the presidency in Vietnam.

Ambassador Lodge explained that the course of recent Vietnamese history had produced a breed of politicians trained in the techniques of plot and conspiracy but ill-suited by background or experience to provide positive political leadership. Ambassador Lodge noted that Tran Van Huong and Pham Khac Suu were probably the two leading civilian figures, but explained that neither was likely to win a national election, and that neither would make a particularly good president, especially Suu.

General Taylor endorsed Ambassador Lodge's assessment of Suu. (Someone--I am not sure who, but I think Secretary Rusk--asked whether the Constituent Assembly had brought forth any new leadership.)

Ambassador Lodge replied that it had produced some potentially promising figures but no one presently capable of winning the office of president.

Secretary Rusk (I think) asked about Dr. Phan Quang Dan.

Ambassador Lodge replied that Dan had a certain measure of political skill and some following, and had performed quite credibly in recent months, but was not really presidential timber.

Ambassador Lodge then summarized the course of the electoral and constitutional process, stressed its importance, and the significance of the progress the GVN was making in this vital area. He then asked Mr. MacDonald to give a brief summary of current activity in the field of land reform.

Secretary Rusk interrupted to call everyone's attention to the great sensitivity of the just-completed discussion about possible Vietnamese presidential candidates and the names that had been brought up. The Secretary underlined the importance of protecting the secrecy of the fact that such a discussion was held by the American delegation. Mr. MacDonald (USAID Director) then gave a short resumé of current progress and problems in the field of land reform.

THE PRESIDENT expressed his belief in the great importance of this issue, noting the universal appeal of land ownership and the deep emotions it arouses. THE PRESIDENT asked if more use could not be made of photographs obtained from aerial reconnaissance, photographs which could be given to individual farmers with the borders of their land outlined on the picture. THE PRESIDENT cited examples from his own experience in the early days of the New Deal which showed the impact such photographs could have.

Mr. Komer noted that the technical resources for providing such a photographic service existed and volunteered General Momyer's assets. (General Momyer smiled but did not comment.)

General Humphreys (USAID Medical Director) made a short presentation on the topic of civilian casualties, outlining what was being done to minimize the hardship of war on the civilian population but

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noting the difficulty in acquiring valid statistics. He called attention to the fact that--despite press comment and resulting public impressions to the contrary--much of the suffering in Vietnam, including burns, was not war-caused or necessarily war-related.

After this final presentation, the PRESIDENT made a few concluding remarks pulling the conference together and laying renewed stress on the central importance of making progress in the political, nation-building sphere as well as in the military struggle.

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Cautionary Comment: The above resumé of the 21 March session was reconstructed from a series of quite sketchy notes. These notes were taken for the private and exclusive use of Mr. Helms and myself to assist us in guiding Agency programs in a manner that would support the President's objectives and policies. The notes were never intended to serve as a basis for a complete reconstruction of the proceedings. These notes were incomplete and hence the above resumé is also incomplete, though to the best of my knowledge and belief it reflects accurately what was said on the points covered.

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